

Transcription - When Things Go Wrong

Welcome back, I'm Kim Baillie, she's Fulyana Orsborn and this is Inside Exec. Today we want to talk about when things go wrong and how you recover and in fact capitalize on those situations. We want you to think about owning the situation, admitting that something has gone wrong, reporting it in whatever way you need to do, identifying the root causes without apportioning blame. So we're not looking for the blame thrower approach. We want you identify possible solutions and then publicize the problem and the solution so that others can learn from that activity.

So owning it is a very, very powerful thing because you know, initially you make a mistake and you feel sick and you kind of think it's almost like you want to run away from it and pretend it never happened. Yes, you can do that but what happens? It goes with you and you feel even more sick. So when you own it, you're almost going into action now. I own it, I'm not happy with myself but I own it. That just went wrong. Yes, whether it might have external factors doesn't matter for my part, I own my part which now puts me in the driver's seat to take the next step and that is admit that something went wrong and then analyse what went wrong. How could I do it better and then go into finding out what is my next step now? One is reporting but then maybe bringing other people in and other people in might be embarrassing because you've got to tell other people that you've stuffed up but, oh sorry I mean you made a mistake, but at the end of the day what you're doing is a sensible thing by finding the right resources to recover. Let's face it, anybody who never made mistakes hasn't done anything, we already know that. So you're never, never alone

If you repeatedly make the same mistake because you're careless and you're really half asleep on the job, that's not what we're talking about. We're talking about when you do everything right but sometimes things go wrong and how to own it, how to act upon it, report it, but when you go to report it, okay, say I acknowledge, I recognise but I've also got some ideas about how to go about it or this just happened I'll come back to you with, how am I going to solve it because sometimes the immediacy of the reporting is crucial and so you haven't worked out what happened and what you're going to do about it. That's fine, but say that upfront.

I'm reminded of an incident that happened just in the last few days. I was away in a country town at a motel, I was going to be out for most of the day and my companion, my travelling companion, was going to be in for most of the day working from the room and so I left early in the morning, he went out when the cleaning staff came along. He went out and said look don't worry about making up the room today, just change the towels, I'll be working here all day so we don't need any other services. Then about half an hour later he decided that he needed to go out for a quick break which he did. He was away for about probably 20 minutes and came back to find that the door of the room was wide open and there was someone working on fixing the floor. He was not happy. The cleaning person came charging out to see him, so obviously she recognised that the situation was wrong and that she had done something or allowed something to happen that she shouldn't have done or she could have handled it better, but she didn't say it, she just came out and said oh how are you going and stood there. He, of course, said what's happening?

She said, oh the owner said that the floor has to be fixed and the microwave has to be changed and he said, we had the discussion about the microwave, we're not going to use it so you can do it after we go in another day's time. The poor cleaning person said, oh but the owner said it has to be done today. He, the guest said, tell the owner, or I will tell the owner, that it doesn't have to be done today, it can be done tomorrow when there's no-one in the room, or in between people being in the room and I did not, at any stage, give anyone permission to come into this room and work on the floor. There's stuff all over the floor, our stuff's been moved, we've got computers and electronic equipment and sensitive information in there and no one spoke to me about it.

Nobody, not the owner, not the cleaner, not the poor handyman, owned that this was wrong, that the situation had gone drastically wrong. They didn't admit it, they didn't talk to one another about it. What happened was that the the cleaner just went in and said oh I'm going to have to tell the owner. So it was our problem that she would have to tell the owner. My travelling companion said, well I'll tell the owner, direct me to where the owner is. That wasn't happening. I know there was no opportunity to identify the root cause because all these people were just running scared of the owner. There was no possible solution that they identified and no opportunity to publicise the problem and the solution, so what happened, of course, when I got back was that we got a request to review the accommodation. So the headline for my review was "wait until the renovations are finished" because that was my solution for people who were thinking about staying. My solution is don't trust that it will be a good experience for you because our experience is not the same. To their credit I did get an apology but it was a very generic apology and certainly not from the owner but probably from one of the poor staff members who had to labor under that situation.

In terms of leadership, I think that you also have to do all of these things. You have to help, you have to admit that it's happened and you have to be part of the reporting, you have to be part of identifying the root causes and it is your role to make sure that no blame gets apportioned. When you're the leader, you absolutely have to find what solutions, what possible solutions, there might be and you do have to acknowledge any of the flack that comes out of the publicity that happens about identifying the problem and the solution.

Now see how Kim told us the story and then summed up. This is very powerful and I think sharing in a story format at certain forums, whatever you have in your organisation, whether it be weekly meeting, monthly meetings, town hall meetings, sharing the story and then sum up and share the success, this didn't go so well, this is what we own that didn't go right but this is what we've now done to stop it happening again. That's the learning.

I did some work with a five star hotel in Asia where they did that every single day. They picked each department, whether we're talking about housekeeping, reception etc etc, each department had to come up with four examples for the day of stories that went right or wrong and what they did about them and what happened. So there could be compliments, there could be complaints, there could have been not noticed by the customers but they were noticed by the staff and what they did about it, every single day. It was morning briefing and then they had to back, the ones that said and these are the measures we put in place, it might be just training, it might be the measure and the only measure is to share it at this

meeting and then don't take care of itself, whatever that is and that they absolutely tracked and measured it statistically. It was proven that there's been huge improvement in that and they turned around so there was more success stories than complaints because there it was all about taking them seriously, owning them, reporting them, actioning them, share their

experience, and it comes back to this basic concept that things will go wrong what you need to do is not react to that situation and not be so driven by the negativity of that situation that you can't think beyond it, then you go into this always happens, I never get it right.

It's the all-every-never inaccurate speaking that I know I've talked about before and I'll probably talk about again but what we need to encourage is that you start to think differently. Okay so it didn't work, it wasn't right, it wasn't as right as I wanted it to be. We look in the mirror, we don't look the way we would like to look so we're a work-in-progress always. So your job is the same. Everything is a work-in-progress and you must continue to progress it and there'll be setbacks and there'll be positives and you celebrate both, but in different ways, because they're both achievements and they're both learning opportunities.

So if we just summarize, what we want you to remember, in terms of things going wrong, is that you own it, you admit it, you report it, you identify the root causes, that there's no blame attached to what has happened, and that you identify possible solutions and publicize both the problem and the solution so that everyone that needs to, can learn from that experience. There we have it, celebrating when things go wrong. I'm Kim Baillie, she's Fulyana Orsborn and this is Inside Exec.